

EXHIBIT 8

A Blockade and a Murder: U.S. Faces Enduring Problems With Saudis

By Edward Wong

Jan. 13, 2019

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, speaking with unusual candor, said Sunday that the United States had tried but failed to end a Saudi Arabia-led blockade of Qatar, a crucial military partner in the Middle East.

He also said Saudi leaders needed to ensure that they would take full responsibility for the death last fall of Jamal Khashoggi, an outspoken dissident who lived in Virginia and who was killed on a visit to the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

Mr. Pompeo made his remarks in Doha, Qatar, just before flying to Riyadh, the Saudi capital, where he is scheduled to meet with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's most powerful figure, on Monday.

Taken together, the comments underscored the challenges faced by the Trump administration as it tries to maintain its relationship with Saudi Arabia and build a coalition against Iran, while mitigating the fallout from a range of actions undertaken by the kingdom and Prince Mohammed, its de facto day-to-day ruler.

The State Department said in a statement on Sunday that American and Qatari officials had discussed the “Gulf crisis” arising from the blockade of Qatar, where the United States military has an important base.

The diplomatic split between Qatar and other Arab nations, which began in 2017, has been a problem for the Trump administration, especially as it seeks to forge a coalition of Arab nations to counter Iran.

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The Arab nations blockading Qatar say the tiny nation is financing terrorists, interfering in their domestic affairs and growing too close with Iran, all charges that Qatari leaders deny.

Officials of Qatar, and the opposing nations, say the blockade could go on for years, and American officials now appear to be veering toward that bleak conclusion.

“It’s on everyone’s mind and not at all clear that the rift is any closer to being resolved today than it was yesterday,” Mr. Pompeo said in a talk with State Department employees at the United States Embassy in Doha, the Qatari capital. “And I regret that.”

Mr. Pompeo said he planned to raise the issue of the blockade with Prince Mohammed in their meeting on Monday, which had originally been scheduled for Sunday night, right after Mr. Pompeo’s arrival in Riyadh.

Instead, Mr. Pompeo was pulled abruptly at the airport into a meeting with Adel bin Ahmed al-Jubeir, a senior official who stepped down last month as foreign minister, and Prince Khaled bin Salman, the crown prince’s younger brother.

A State Department spokesman, Robert Palladino, said late Sunday that among the issues Mr. Pompeo had discussed with the two Saudis were the need to counter Iran and to end the Yemen war, where a Saudi-led coalition has been conducting airstrikes against the Houthis, a rebel force. The airstrikes have killed thousands of civilians, and the war has resulted in the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, with many Yemenis starving.

At a news conference earlier in Doha on Sunday, Mr. Pompeo said he would discuss the Khashoggi murder with Prince Mohammed to “make sure we have all the facts so that they are held accountable, certainly by the Saudis but by the United States as well where appropriate.”

Mr. Khashoggi was killed and dismembered by a Saudi hit team while visiting the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on Oct. 2, Turkish officials have said. The C.I.A. determined that Prince Mohammed had ordered the killing.



Police officers in Turkey investigating the killing of the Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi last year. Osman Orsal/Reuters

But President Trump has not endorsed that finding, and has said the United States will continue its relationship with Saudi Arabia and with the prince, who is close to Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law and main Middle East adviser.

Mr. Pompeo has supported the president's viewpoint but has also spoken on occasion of the need for accountability by the Saudis. Middle East experts working in the State Department have concluded that the Saudis have not yet met the threshold of accountability.

A Saudi court has begun trial proceedings for 11 suspects in the Khashoggi killing, and prosecutors are seeking the death penalty for five of them.

The Saudi government has also removed a few senior officials from their posts, including Saud al-Qahtani, a close associate of the prince who was the kingdom's social media czar.

The prince has played a leading role in Saudi Arabia's policy with regard to both the Qatar blockade and the Yemen war.

As a result of the intractable situation over Qatar, Anthony Zinni, a retired Marine general and former head of American forces in the Middle East, resigned last week from his post as a Trump administration envoy charged with resolving the blockade.

"We were going nowhere on the Qatar issue," Mr. Zinni wrote last week in an email to The New York Times. CBS News first reported his resignation.

The rift among key Gulf partners has frustrated Pentagon officials. A senior defense official said that each time the Americans brought it up, Saudi and Emirati officials would dig in more.

The United States has told other Gulf nations that it will participate in a wide range of military training exercises only if Qatar is included. In all but one exercise, the hostile governments have allowed the Qatari military to participate.

At a news conference with Mr. Pompeo in Doha, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, Qatar's foreign minister, called his country's relationship with the United States "a strong partnership based on very strong premises."

Qatar shows no signs of giving up on its commitment to the Pentagon, and the American military continues to operate its air base at Al Udeid, which houses about 10,000 military personnel.

But Pentagon and intelligence officials say they fear that the split among the Arab nations will push Qatar closer to Iran.

"There's no way forward, and we're kind of stuck in it for now," said Hussein Ibish, a scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. "I think something seriously has got to change to make either or both sides reconsider."

There are other pressures on the relationship between the Trump administration and Saudi Arabia. The Republican-led Senate voted last month to end American military assistance to the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemen war. And the flight to Canada of Rahaf Alqunun, an 18-year-old Saudi woman who fled from the kingdom and her family this month, has again put a spotlight on human rights in the conservative nation.

But Mr. Ibish said he did not foresee the United States breaking the relationship over any of those issues.

"There's one country in the Gulf region that is large, powerful and shares most of our long-term goals about stability and security, and that's Saudi Arabia," he said. "So the list of options is very short. It's zero for both countries."

8/23/2019

A Blockade and a Murder: U.S. Faces Enduring Problems With Saudis- The New York Times

Eric Schmitt contributed reporting from Washington.

A version of this article appears in print on Jan. 13, 2019, Section A, Page 6 of the New York edition with the headline: A Blockade and a Murder: U.S. Faces Enduring Problems with Saudis